

---

## The Vancouver, BC Region: Translink and the GVRD

### Overview

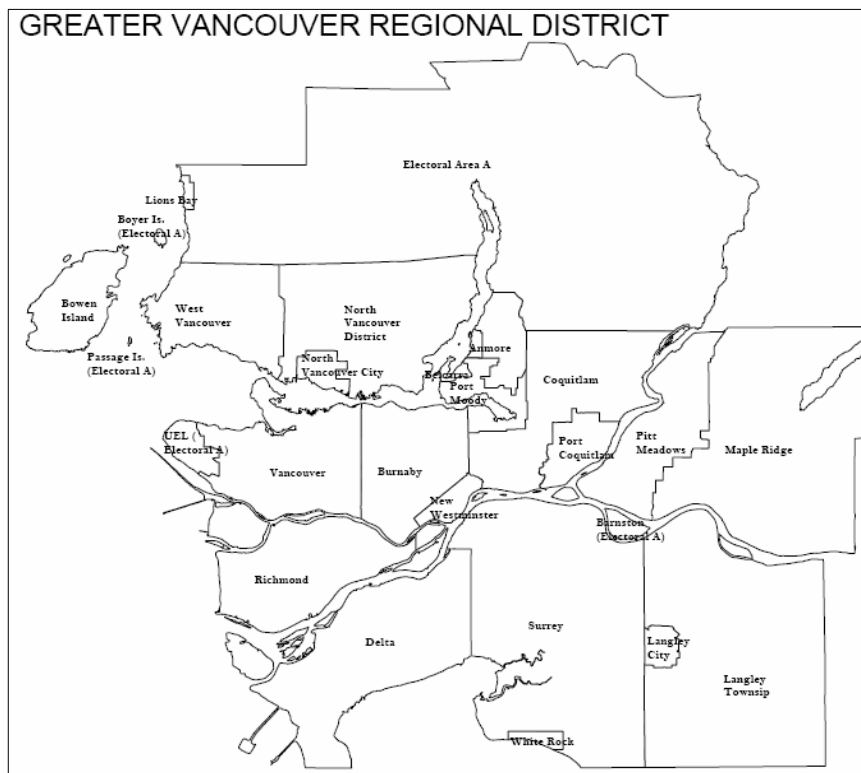
Translink is a creation of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) and the provincial parliament. It was formed primarily to:

- Develop regional transportation plans
- Administer service contracts with subsidiary companies and contractors
- Manage capital projects
- Provide financial management

Road, transit and transportation demand management services to the public are provided by wholly owned operating subsidiaries or by contractors.

### The Region

Metro serves the 2.1 million people living in the greater Vancouver area, included unincorporated areas (2005). The area encompasses approximately 1,110 sq. miles, 26% of which was urbanized (2001).



## Primary Transportation Responsibilities

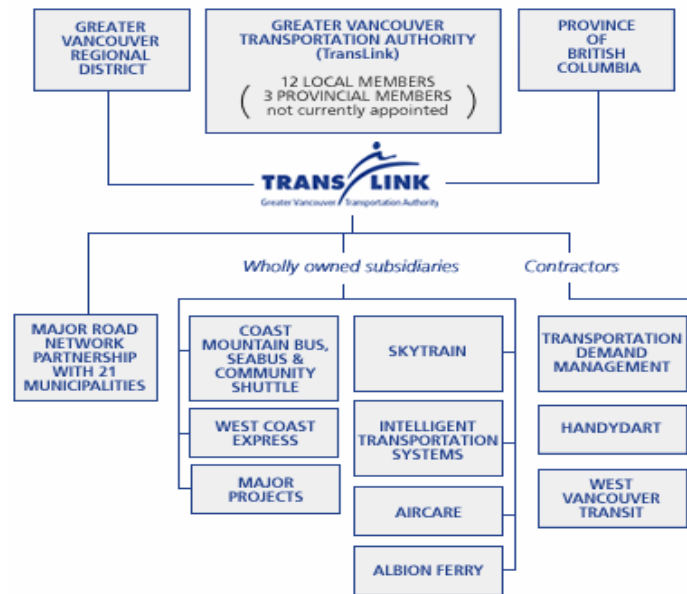
	Regional Systems Planning	Financial Resources	Capital and Infrastructure Construction	Systems Operation and Maintenance
Local	-	-	-	-
County	-	-	-	-
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advises GVRD and cities on the regional growth strategy</li> <li>• Writes the regional transportation plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provincial grants</li> <li>• Transit fares and service fees</li> <li>• Property taxes</li> <li>• Parking tax</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds systems necessary for the transportation system that are not part of the provincial system</li> <li>• Rapid transit project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operates regional transportation system</li> <li>• TDM programs</li> </ul>

By statute, the GVTA must: (a) manage and operate the regional transportation system; (b) develop and implement transportation demand management strategies and programs; (c) develop and administer programs for certifying motor vehicle compliance with regulations, made under section 50 of the *Motor Vehicle Act*, that do one or both of the following: (i) establish exhaust emission standards; (ii) specify the maximum levels of air contaminants that motor vehicles may emit into the outside atmosphere; (d) generate and manage funds necessary for its purpose; (e) acquire, construct and maintain any assets, facilities and other real or personal property required for the regional transportation system; (f) review, and advise the Greater Vancouver Regional District, the municipalities and the government regarding the implications to the regional transportation system of, (i) the regional growth strategy and any amendments to it, (ii) official community plans applicable to any part of the transportation service region and any amendments to those plans, and (iii) major development proposals and provincial highway infrastructure plans in the transportation service region; (g) prepare and implement strategic, service, capital and operational plans for the regional transportation system, including a strategic transportation plan; (h) from time to time, negotiate agreements with the government for contribution by the government to the funding of the capital costs of maintaining, improving or expanding the regional transportation system;

What's interesting here is what the authority is NOT responsible for: (a) construction, maintenance or regulation of any part of the provincial highway system or of any highway that is neither a major road nor part of a designated project, (b) the management, operation, construction or maintenance of the major road network, except (c) the planning, acquisition or construction of the Rapid Transit Project

## Structure

The GVTA board is comprised of 15 members, 12 of whom are appointed by the GVRD and three appointed by the Province. In December 2000, the three provincially appointed directors requested that their appointments be rescinded, citing conflicts between their role as a TransLink board member and as an MLA. The province has declined to appoint members since that time and the Board of Directors currently comprises 12 GVRD-appointed representatives. The GVTA functions independently of the GVRD board or any other agency but its programs and policies have to conform to the Livable Region Strategic Plan. Furthermore, any additional taxation or borrowing limits would have to be first forwarded to member municipalities for comment and, second, receive ratification by the GVRD Board.

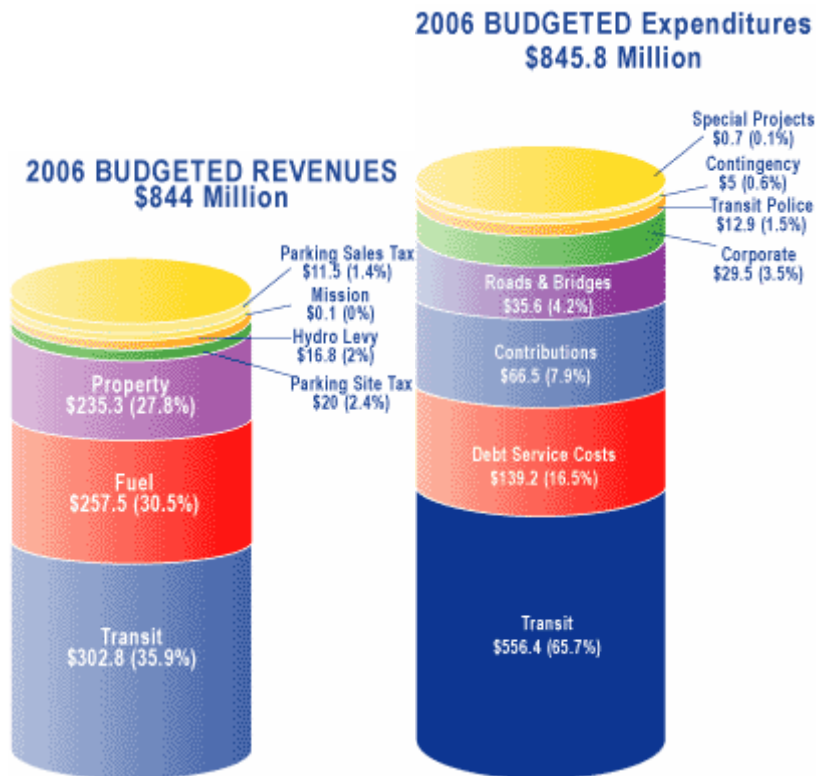


## Financing

As a municipal entity, TransLink is not legally permitted to operate at a deficit.

(All numbers in thousands)

	2005	2004	2003	2002
<b>REVENUES</b>				
Transit Fares and Advertising	\$292,402	\$264,448	\$248,571	\$232,748
Fuel Tax	\$254,628	\$252,294	\$242,748	\$227,657
Other Taxes and Levies	\$245,089	\$158,792	\$149,858	\$142,250
AirCare	\$ 26,653	\$ 25,148	\$ 26,606	\$ 30,533
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$818,772</b>	<b>\$700,682</b>	<b>\$667,783</b>	<b>\$633,188</b>



## History

In 1967, the BC Provincial Legislature created regional districts, including one for Vancouver. It had four separate legal entities that shared common administrative staffs and had boards of directors that were almost identical. One of these entities was the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). It was granted wide authority over a number of municipal services and planning, including sewage treatment, water supply, regional parks, social housing, air quality management, and others. The GVRD is composed of 21 municipalities, has 35 members on its board, and casts 112 weighted votes depending on how large an entity someone represents.

The GRVD has planning responsibilities similar to those of most MPOs in the U.S., but it has legislative and regulatory authority over land use. One commentator described it as:

“The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) is a federation of twenty municipalities and two electoral areas (Figure 1). The GVRD Board comprises directors representing the municipalities as appointed by each municipal council. In the electoral areas the voters of the respective areas elect the directors. The GVRD provides area-wide functions such as regional parks, water and sewage, regional hospital planning and strategic land use planning.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1997, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) and the provincial government

<sup>1</sup> Toward regional transportation governance: A case study of Greater Vancouver  
JOHN F. MELIGRANA, Department of Geography, California State University,  
Northridge, California 91330-8249, Transportation 26: 359–380, 1999.  
ã 1999 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands.

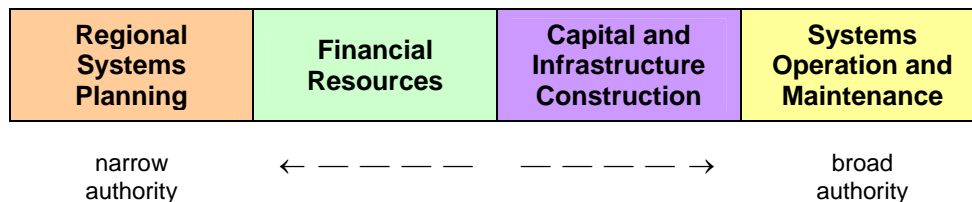
began to negotiate the transfer of responsibility for transit and other regional transportation services from the Province to the GVRD. The overall objective was to promote the development and implementation of transportation plans that would meet the objectives of the Province and the GVRD. The result of these negotiations was the creation of the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority (TransLink) in April 1999.

## Important Historical Dates

1897–1962 BCER – private transit monopoly – poor regional service to suburbs  
 1912 West Vancouver begins operation of its own municipal bus service  
 1950s BCER invests in modern buses and trolleys  
 1961 Province expropriates BCER  
 1962–1980 B.C. Hydro operates bus transit  
 1972–1975 B.C. Hydro expands bus operation at the direction of NDP government  
 1974 Common fare structure agreement between West Vancouver’s blue bus and B.C. Hydro (talk of merger)  
 1980 Urban Transit Authority Act – created MTOC – operates bus service  
 1982 Urban Transit Authority becomes B.C. Transit  
 1983 Transit planning function removed from GVRD  
 1993 GVRD publishes Transport 2021  
 1999 GVTA created

## Governance Elements

- **Municipal Membership is Voluntary or Required**  
 Translink was created by the provincial parliament at the behest of GVRD. The GVRD has a voluntary membership, and all municipalities in the region are members
- **The Size of the Region**  
 The region is broadly drawn and includes both urbanized areas and rural areas in order to contain “spill over effects” of regional growth.
- **The Mode Responsibilities of the Authority**  
 Translink is primarily responsible for both roadway and transit projects in the region.
- **The Transportation Functions of the Authority**  
 Translink’s transportation functions include both planning and financing transportation system projects. Translink also has capital and operational responsibilities which it frequently contracts out.



- **Land Use, Economic Development, and other Responsibilities**

While Translink does not have land use authority, it has a series of reciprocal agreements in place with the GVRD to ensure that land use and transportation planning functions are integrated and coordinated. It also has motor vehicle regulatory authority.

- **Regional Authority Leadership**

Translink is governed by a 15-member board that represents locally elected officials from throughout the region. Members must be a member of the GVRG or hold municipal office.

- **Revenue-Sharing or Sub-Regional Equity**

Translink's project prioritization mechanism does not explicitly use revenue sharing or sub-regional equity.

## **Other Information of an Evaluative Nature: Recent Projects and Financial Crisis**

TransLink will be running deficits of \$200 million or more per year by 2010. Since it's not allowed to run deficits, TransLink directors voted to postpone the opening of the Evergreen rapid transit line by nearly two years and deferred buying new SkyTrain cars. Yet they are proceeding with a huge roads project, as suburban directors outvoted Vancouver and Burnaby members to support the province's \$3-billion Gateway project, which will twin the Port Mann Bridge, expand the Trans-Canada Highway and build new truck routes on both sides of the Fraser River.

TransLink is also behind on other transit projects. It was supposed to have 1,800 buses in its fleet by now but has only 1,300, planning vice-president Glen Leicester said. It has built only a third of the rapid transit it had planned. Only 11.5 per cent of travelers in the region use transit instead of 17 per cent as planned. It has barely begun to implement a package of transportation demand management measures such as tolls and transit priority systems.

Marvin Shaffer, an economist who was chief negotiator for the Greater Vancouver Regional District when the province created TransLink in 1999, says it was left in the lurch by the provincial government. TransLink was granted base funding and limited powers to increase transit fares, raise property taxes, collect a Hydro levy and create a parking tax. The province used to pay 100 per cent of rapid transit projects, and at one point promised TransLink it would cover at least 60 per cent. Provincial support has now fallen to less than 20 per cent.

Initially, for funds needed to buy buses, pay for rapid transit lines and build roads and bridges to keep the fast-growing Greater Vancouver region moving, TransLink got two additional options: vehicle levies and tolls, which could have raised another \$100 million/year. But specific proposals for either were not supported by the NDP. Without the vehicle levy, TransLink's operating company, Coast Mountain Bus, had to cut services and that led to a 2001 transit strike. Then-TransLink chairman George Puil became the lightning rod for public discontent; Vancouver voters threw him out of office in 2002.

TransLink was under pressure from the province and its municipal allies to downgrade rapid transit, and replace it with the Richmond-Airport-Vancouver line, now called the Canada Line. TransLink had to eat \$300 million in long-term debt and agree to repay another \$700 million to

the line's private builder once it is running. If TransLink doesn't spend on new projects, it will be running a \$40-million deficit by 2010, when the Canada Line debt arrives. If it builds all the projects in its 10-year outlook, that deficit bloats to \$200 million a year. Problems were also caused by the decision to replace its trolley bus fleet with new trolleys, which cost twice as much as diesels, he said.

There have been recent calls to disband TransLink, and give the authority back to the province, by the Canadian Taxpayers Union, a consumers group. That appears unlikely, for the moment. But a Federal or Provincial bailout is also not going to happen immediately, despite there being no clear idea on the part of anyone as to how to get the agency out of debt.